

Along in the early summer, I started smoking a cigar after lunch. While the other men were napping, I'd sit blowing long streams of blue smoke into a dreamy haze. Four south windows carried the fumes unto a big frontyard out into a 350 acre horse trap. So as long as the wind didn't die, the habit was a relatively inoffensive act by an old graybearded herder that wasn't hurting anyone except himself.

Later on, I added an after dinner cigar in my backyard at Mertzon. Summer evenings are quiet in town. We have no close neighbors. It's not unusual for the citizens to burn their trash before darkness. Ralph Nader and his clean air fanatics are no problem. I was able to spend many an evening smoking without being detected by any weak-eyed or weak-nosed soul that is offended by the smell of burned tobacco.

Like any negative habit, the cigar smoking increased. Unaware of my cigar one night, I took a phone call in our bedroom. A lengthy hassle with an oilman caused the trauma that only the country's fossil fuel miners can generate in the stewards of the land. I suppose it was a 20-or 30 minute call.

Next day, Child Who Sits in the Sun aired the mattresses and cleaned the drapes. She emptied the closets, washed the shoe bags, dumped the dresser drawers, burned two good feather pillows, and threw away a bedspread.

I was absent during the demonstration. However, that night underneath my dinner plate there was a cigar ring fashioned into a perfect noose and a cellophane wrapper formed into a wreath.

At that very moment (and this is an important time in the story), I realized the Shortgrass Country had become too crowded to smoke cigars. Woven wire fences and steel boundary markers, wills and testamentary trusts had cut the land into too many pieces to smoke in peace. The coming of the railroad and the desecration of the land by hundreds of highway right-of-ways had brought too

many people for a man to burn anything more offensive than an incense candle.

It wasn't her noose or the wreath. No foolish Indian woman is going to frighten me from my rightful pleasures. So what if she does carry a knife and a tomahawk? Her mother carried a knife, tomahawk, and a lance. Doesn't that prove she's one third less dangerous than her mother? Of course it does.

Great Whiskers the Youngster threw off his cigar habit without institutional care. Whiskers cold turkeyed a nicotine addiction so deep that it'd make the vows of Elizabeth Taylor's last marriage sound like she was rehearsing for one of those movies she used to make back when she was a kid.

Whiskers did chew up a coil of 33 thread lariat rope and must have eaten 16 bushels of Life Savers before he was cured. He lost the best cowboy he ever had and drove a horseshoe nail in the meat of his thumb so deep that kerosene wouldn't go to the bottom of the hole. But he sure never did smoke any more cigars.

For some reason I'm having a hard time sitting at this typewriter today. My old eyes keep twitching and the trembling in my hands is terrible. I wish one of those Havana wrappers would invent a tobacco that was part chlorophyll. I made a terrible mistake of not building her a teepee instead of a closed lodge.